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ENHANCING COMMUNICATION FOR A MORE APPEALING ORGANIZATION

Case: Jyväskylän Tradenomiopiskelijat

Katri Viinamäki

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Abstract

The purpose of the thesis was to look into the image of Jyväskylän Tradenomiopiskelijat ry within its target group, investigate the functionality of its communication processes and find ways to make the organization more appealing.

The research method is qualitative. Primary data was collected with semi-structured interviews and observation. The theoretical part of the thesis covers marketing from the perspective of a nonprofit organization, the significance of communication and the image of an organization. The implementation part of the thesis covers the research methods used, process of data gathering and analysis of the obtained data.

The results of the research showed that the organization's image has much to do with the events it organizes, and that the target group wasn't very well aware of the trusteeship services it provides or the benefits of membership. When discussing communication it became apparent that social media remains as the most efficient means of contacting students, but that noise is a substantial problem. Face-to-face communication, on the other hand, proved to be especially efficient.

In conclusion the image of the organization is in itself positive, but the organization should consider if it is the image they want to have. The most efficient means of increasing the attractiveness of the organization proved to be getting member benefits and increasing informing and visibility. Finally, the organization was advised to resume research to ensure up-to-date information about the wants, needs and motivations of the target group.

Keywords
Student organization, communication, nonprofit organization, image

Miscellaneous

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Tiivistelmä

Opinnäytteen tarkoituksena oli selvittää Jyväskylän Tradenomiopiskelijat ry:n imago sen kohderyhmän sisällä, tutkia viestinnän toimivuutta ja löytää keinoja yhdistyksen houkuttelevuuden lisäämiseksi.

Tutkimusmetodi oli laadullinen. Primääridata hankittiin teemahaastatteluilla ja havainnoinnilla. Opinnäytetyön teoreettinen osuus käsitteli markkinointia nonprofit-organisaation näkökulmasta, kommunikaation merkitystä ja organisaation imagoa. Toteutusosassa taas käsiteltiin käytettyjä tutkimusmenetelmiä ja selostettiin tiedonhankinnan prosessi sekä hankitun tiedon analysointi.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittivat, että organisaation imago liittyy lähinnä sen järjestämiin tapahtumiin ja että edunvalvonta ja jäsenedut eivät olleet erityisen hyvin opiskelijoiden tiedossa. Viestintää käsiteltäessä selvisi että sosiaalinen media tavoittaa opiskelijat edelleen tehokkaasti, mutta ongelmana on häly. Kasvokkain tapahtuvan kommunikaation taas todettiin olevan erityisen tehokasta ja suhtautuminen tällaisiin markkinointiviestinnän keinoihin oli varsin positiivista.

Lopputuloksena on, että organisaation imago on sinänsä positiivinen, mutta organisaation tulisi miettiä onko se silti halutunlainen. Tehokkaimmaksi keinoksi lisätä organisaation houkuttelevuutta todettiin jäsenetujen hankkiminen sekä tiedotuksen ja näkyvyyden lisääminen. Lopuksi organisaatiota kehotettiin jatkamaan tutkimuksen tekemistä, jotta se saisi varmistettua ajantasaisen tiedon kohderyhmän haluista, tarpeista sekä motivaatioista.

Avainsanat (asiasanat)
Opiskelijajärjestö, kommunikaatio, nonprofit-organisaatio, imago

Muut tiedot

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INTRODUCTION

The thesis was commissioned by Jyväskylän Tradenomiopiskelijat ry, the BBA student association of JAMK University of Applied Sciences. The interest in the topic was sparked by the author's own background in the association. As a former board member of the association in question, the author has had a chance to gain a deep understanding of the functions of a study field student association and wanted to use the knowledge acquired and observations made to improve some of their processes. The observations made brought the author, along with the association, to the conclusion that their communication processes were not up to par and that by the means of research the process could be started to improve communication to better suit their purposes and increase their visibility within the target group. The research also investigates the image of the organization and suggests ways of improvement for a more appealing student organization.

A nonprofit organization (NPO) such as the case association does not differ from any profit-driven company in the sense that without an active and sufficiently large customer base they simply cannot operate. The subject of the research and the research problems later described are universal and applicable. Communication is ever changing, and especially now with the changes brought on by social media it is evolving faster than ever before and the importance of keeping up cannot be overstated.

Communication is the exchange of information between individual, groups or organizations by means speaking, writing or using some other medium. This thesis focuses on external communication, which happens between an individual and an organization. In the theoretical framework the reasons why efficient and effective communication is so important are discussed, what makes communication good and what kind of challenges are faced. The quality of external communication has a rather direct impact on the image of the organization, which is why the two topics, communication and organizational image, go well hand in hand in research.

The importance of reputation management comes from the fact that people form images of organizations whether they want it or not. While the birth of these images cannot be fully controlled, an organization can influence their contents. A positive image can give an advantage to an organization, but a negative image surely harms it, and fixing a negative image is always harder than building a positive one from the beginning. Reliability and credibility are parts of the image, and it is essential they are apparent to stakeholders. Reputation is a part of the image and it can be considered as social capital (Pitkänen 2001, 17-18). In order to influence and enhance their image, an organization needs to know what their image is to begin with. Since no recent research on the subject has been made at the case organization, it was chosen as a part of this research.

The research was conducted during the spring of 2014. The research method was qualitative, and primary data was collected with semi-structured interviews and observation.

1.1 Introducing the case organization

Jyväskylän Tradenomiopiskelijat ry is a study field student association at JAMK University of Applied Sciences related for the students of the School of Business and Services management. In 2014, the association had 730 registered members. The mission of the association is to provide trusteeship, benefits and entertainment for its members.

The organization’s set of rules describes its purpose as follows:

The study field student association’s purpose is to

- *Act as its members' interest group, promote and supervise the interests of the students of the university of applied sciences and strengthen their sociological status*
- *Improve the contents of education and studentship*
- *Act as a link and a means of communication and improve collaboration between members, the national union, the student union and the university of applied sciences as well as other interest groups*

To implement its purpose the organization arranges meetings, briefings and discussion events, maintains contacts between members and other study field student associations as well as regional, national and international student organizations.

Trusteeship is arguably the most important task of a study field student association. At any given time there is an assigned person in the board of the association who acts as the trustee for each study programme they represent. Members are encouraged to contact them if they feel like their rights as students are being threatened. The organization also manages tutor operations for the new students.

The most visible parts of their operations are the various events organized several times during the semesters. These events are the major income source for the nonprofit organization. Jyväskylä, having two major institutions of higher education with over 23 500 students between them, has 44 different study field student associations and student organizations providing a surplus of student events. This is why having sufficient visibility, maintaining a flow of new members and activating them to participate is absolutely crucial for the survival and functionality of the organization.

1.2 Research problem, questions and objective

Out of the 1023 Bachelor of Business Administration students who were attending JAMK University of Applied sciences at the time of the research a moderate part, 730 students, were registered members of the study field student association. Out of those 1023 students, 115 were foreign nationals, and during the academic year of 2013-2014, 195 other exchange students were studying at the school (Hynynen, 2014). Despite the large number of foreign students and the efforts made by the association, it could be observed that the non-Finnish students were considerably less active attending the events organized and interested in the services provided by the study field student association than the Finnish students. In 2013 Jyväskylän Tradenomiopiskelijat ry commissioned a survey to find out how well know the association is within their target group. According to the results, the age or gender of a respondent were not significant factors when it came to their knowledge of the association but their degree programme was. Whereas almost every student surveyed and studying in the Finnish-speaking degree programmes responded that they had heard about the association, 18.6% of English-speaking students of the Degree Programme in International Business had no prior knowledge of the association. (Arkimaa, Elo, Haataja, Koikkalainen, Puranen, Rapo & Salo 2013, 11) Out of the International Business student respondents only 27.9% said they were members (Arkimaa et al. 2013, 9).

Even though the survey mentioned above revealed that the respondents were fairly well aware of the existence of the organization, it did reveal that they did not clearly know what services were provided. Half the respondents stated that they knew little about the services and only few out of the 244 said they were well aware of the organization’s operations (Arkimaa et al. 2013, 31). This raises the question: How can you attract members when the target group is not aware of the benefits? Quite obviously, the communication strategy of the organization was in need of an update.

In order to better serve its members, Jyväskylän Tradenomiopiskelijat ry commissioned this research hoping to find out how their processes could be improved to increase their visibility within the target group, and thus attract more active members especially from the obvious problem group: the foreign student population. The following research questions were used as tools to gather such information that could help the organization better understand their target group and communicate with it. The research questions are as follow:

- How is the organization perceived within the target group?
- How could communication be enhanced? And
- **How to make the organization more appealing?**

1.3 Research methods and approach

Research methods are the tools used to systematically and purposefully gather data in order to obtain the desired information. These tools are what will ultimately give answers to the research questions. The role of a research method is to logically lead into conclusions, to explain how said conclusions were made and to make the subject accessible and comprehensible to people other than the researcher, too. The suitability of research methods and techniques chosen entirely depends on the research problem and the purpose of the research in question. The techniques most commonly used are structured, semi-structured or unstructured interviews, surveys and observations. (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2002, 85)

The difference between qualitative and quantitative research lies in procedures. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research does not make conclusions based on statistics or generalizations made from large sample sizes. The different research methods approach the questions in fundamentally different ways, viewing knowledge from entirely different perspectives and having different objectives. Nevertheless, the two different methods are not mutually exclusive and can be used side by side. This research, however, was conducted entirely by using qualitative methods. (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2002, 86)

For this research a qualitative research approach was chosen for several reasons, with the nature of the research problem as well as the author's background and previous experience as the main reasons. Qualitative research is commonly used is social and behavioral sciences, thus making it suitable for studying organizations as well as individuals. The emphasis of the research at issue is on understanding the members and prospective members of the association and their motivations as well as viewpoints in a deeper level that can only be achieved through the tools of qualitative research. (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2002, 87)

Observation is a tool of data collection that enables the researcher to learn about research subjects by watching their behavior and listening to them. The observations made can be used to make analytical interpretations. The advantage of this approach is that research subjects can be studied in a natural setting where they are more likely to speak freely of their mind. Observing research subjects in a natural setting also has the advantage of being able to see their attitudes and the influence of a group setting in a way that would not be revealed in a questionnaire or an interview. (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2002, 90-91) For this research, field observation was chosen as the preferred method because it was the most natural way considering the nature of the case organization and its target group.

The other tool of data collection in this case was interviewing. It was easy for the researcher to identify the necessary qualities of the interviewees and get acquainted with their backgrounds. Their values and expectations would be revealed in the course of the interviews, which were important issues to consider. Due to the aim to uncover personal opinions and preferences, it was concluded that a semi-structured interview would be the best way to go about the research. The topics and issues as well as a suitable sample were predetermined. The interviews followed a prepared pattern, but the questions were open-ended leaving space for any other issues or ideas that might arise, so that the interview could be conducted in the form of a discussion rather than as a survey. Careful consideration was put into avoiding bias. The sample of the interviewees was semi-randomly picked to represent the average students of the target group, making sure that the sample would include both new students and older ones with more experience of the "student life scene" as well as both Finnish and foreign students.

Though the author had previously been an active board member in the case organization, by the time of the research they were completely detached from any inside operations, approaching the research as an outsider, not as a member of the association.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Marketing in a nonprofit organization

Traditionally the concept of marketing has been strongly connected to business entities. By means of marketing the demand for products or services can be directly or non-directly increased. The need for marketing comes from the need to ensure profitability in both short and long term. Marketing can however be applied to such organizations that are not driven by profitability as well (Vuokko 2003, 13). Though the primary objective of an NPO is not to make a profit, it still must have financial targets to, at the very least, cover their expenses. Possible surplus can be used to make investments.

According to Vuokko (2003, 14) the name “Nonprofit organization” derives from the fact that their primary objective is not to generate profit. To such an organization the single most important thing driving them is their mission, which should be apparent in all of their operations. In order to fulfill their mission, an organization needs input from several different sources. In a case such as our case organization a significant part of the input comes from volunteer workers. Even though in a case such as this one the personnel expenses are non-existent the organization still needs monetary input – which mostly comes from the members by way of admission fees collected from events organized for them. Monetary input also comes from other interest groups, but in the yearly budget these grants and allowances only cover a fraction of the expenses. (Meno- ja tuloarvio vuodelle 2014, 2013).

Vuokko (2003, 21-24) divides NPO’s into three categories: private membership organizations, education- and charity organizations and public sector nonprofit-organizations. All three types have different financing models.

Examples of private membership organizations include hobby clubs, homeowners' associations and student organizations, such as the case organization. Their mission is to promote their members' cause by providing services and taking stand on their behalf. Their operations are mostly financed by membership fees, but they can also have a regional or a national roof organization that provides them with materials, guidance, expert help and in some cases, monetary contributions. The organization may, however, have to turn over a part of their income from membership fees to them. Input can also be received from other sponsors such as the local government. The figure below presents the flow of contributions between the background organization, the organization and the members. Money is by no means the only thing moving between them. The members can give the organization their work contribution or other assets such as expertise or help from their own networks for the good of the whole group and as mentioned earlier the background organization has many different ways of contributing, too. The organization provides their background organization with more members and more visibility.

FIGURE 1. Input model of a private membership organization
(Vuokko 2003, 21)

When looking at our case organization's sources of income it can be seen that it follows the same pattern, though the distribution might somewhat differ from other public membership organizations. From figure 2 it can be seen that the majority of income (68%) comes from the members in the form of event admission fees. No membership fees are collected. Grants from the background organization only count for 2% of the income. The remaining 30% ("other") mostly comes from sponsorship deals. (Meno- ja tuloarvio vuodelle 2014, 2013)

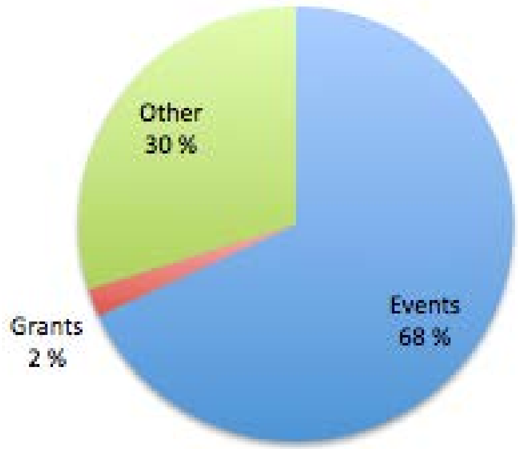

FIGURE 2. Jyväskylän Tradenomiopiskelijat distribution of income

The importance of marketing can be concluded from the share of the income that comes from the events. Without sufficient marketing the members won’t be aware of the events or may not see a reason to attend. The role of marketing is to influence and to increase the visibility of the organization and its services. It has many objectives, like answering the needs of customers, creating interest and lowering the threshold for trying new things.

Marketing of an NPO should be target group oriented. The organization should examine their target group and ask themselves what the person wants, what kind of marketing channels do they respond to positively and what it would take for them to become interested and become a member. How the prospective members make the decision to join or not join is affected by many factors, such as their values, situation in life, experiences, the image of the organization and how they feel they could benefit from becoming members. The experiences and comments they hear from their own circle of acquaintances have a huge impact. Social influencing can go both ways, but encouraging members to share their good experiences with outsiders can be a very effective means of marketing. After the target group and their needs have been analyzed the next part of marketing planning would be to create and convey an image of the organization to the prospective members that displays the benefits of becoming a member and shows it in an appealing light. Simply put, marketing consists of two things: giving an alluring promise and fulfilling it. (Vuokko 2003, 39-43)

2.2 The significance of communication

Juholin (2009, 36) states that communication is not as straightforward as one would wish. Regardless of best intentions the impact is not always what we were expecting. This can be due to the message not having gone through to the intended audience or even if it did they might not have understood it correctly. The message might not be interesting enough for the recipient to pay their full attention and sometimes the fault lies within the sender. Some messages are intentionally rejected.

When we look into the communication process and at the communication model we see what Juholin meant by her comment. The goal of communication is to relay information from one person or group to another. The communication process has three basic components: a *sender* who has an idea which they then shape into a message (encoding) and send through a *channel* to the *receiver* who interprets (decodes) the message. The final feature of the communication model is feedback cycle, since communication rarely only goes one way. The receiver responds with a reply. Without the feedback the sender cannot be sure that the message was interpreted as intentioned or even received and what their reaction to the message was. (The Communication Process)

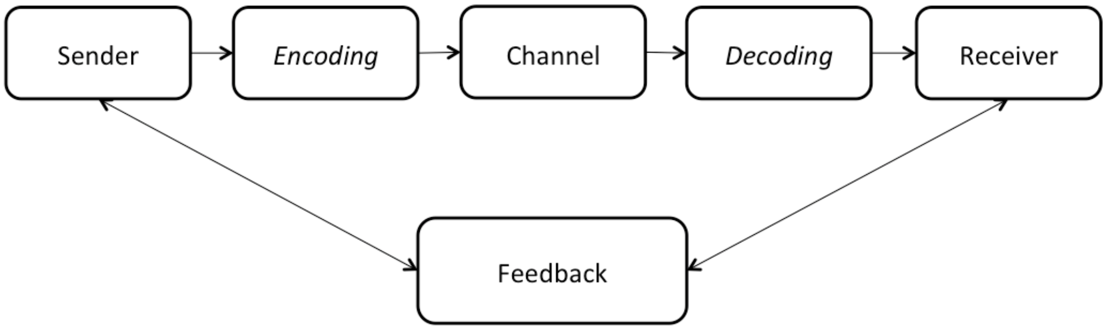

FIGURE 3. Communication model

The criterion of success in communication is common understanding. This requires both parties to agree both on the content of the message as well as its meaning.

Communication can be effective and efficient, but is often not both at the same time. Efficient communication saves resources like time and money. Mass lectures at schools or mass e-mails at work are examples of efficient communication. The message uses a channel that can easily and quickly reach a large audience, but the sender can never be absolutely sure that the message reaches everyone and fills its purpose of conveying the original idea. If there is no possibility for feedback in the form of clarifying questions, it is possible that erroneous interpretations occur. Effective communication includes a more personal approach to relaying the message and enables direct feedback but is costly in terms of time.

The key to improving communication is knowing the recipient: their situation, needs and expectations. The message can then be shaped in away that touches the target or is conveyed in a way that is agreeable to them. (Juholin 2009, 36)

2.3 What is good communication like?

By now we have established the importance of good communication. In this chapter we will go through means to achieve it.

Good communication happens on time and in real time. Regular informing keeps the organization in its member's mind and may encourage them to become an active member instead of a rank and file member. When necessary, informing should be proactive to reach an audience wide enough early enough. Having real time communication is important for the organization's credibility and that's why messages from members should be quickly responded to, and websites and other online coverage should be kept up-to-date. If the previous entry on a website is months or even years old it frankly decreases its credibility to zero and harms the organization's image. (Ilvonen 2007, 18-19)

Apart from the informing being timely it should also be focused, simple and clear. An event or a service the organization provides might not be useful or of interest to all of its members and should not be unnecessarily directed to them. The message should contain every bit of information the receiver needs to get but no more. It should go without saying that especially when it comes to formal informing and promotional announcements, proper grammar is important. (Ilvonen 2007, 18-19)

A good communicator knows their receiver and what they expect. From the perspective of marketing communication there are two kinds of receivers: active information seekers and passive message receivers. An active information seeker has appreciation for communication that helps their personal processes. They seek information from websites and expect to find the information they need. Matters are illustrated and there is a possibility to receive additional information. An active information seeker appreciates openness and willingness to be of service. However if the customer is in the receiving end of communication that they feel is not completely honest and open and does not provide all information necessary it has an aversive effect. It should always be remembered that it is much more difficult to regain than gain customers. Alternatively, a passive message receiver appreciates lightness, wittiness and humor. They do not like an intrusive, disturbing or annoying approach. This particularly applies to communication where they are not able to influence whether they receive it or not. As arguably most of any organization's members belong to this latter group. It is especially important that the quality of communication towards them is high. (Vuokko 2002, 68-70)

2.4 Challenges in communication

Communication is prone to distractions. Åberg (2000, 31) describes Osmo A. Wiio's classification of distractions into four categories. The first one is a *barrier*. A barrier occurs when the message does not reach its intended receiver due to external factors. An e-mail sent might get lost in the spam filter or a poster advertising an event can go unnoticed amidst others. The message gets lost after sending and before receiving. *Noise* interferes with communication when the message is blended into other messages or distractions. It does not stand out from the mass. Noise is also an external distraction. Moving onto internal distractions, *loss* appears when the message reaches the receiver but a part of the message disappears due to an internal distraction, such as lack of concentration. In the case of *distortion* the message is again received but it is understood and interpreted incorrectly.

From another perspective the barriers to effective communication can be manifold and both internal and external. Chris Smith, founder and CEO of OPIN stated in his blog in 2013 that there are seven types of barriers to effective communication. *Physical barriers* are external factors that hinder communication in a very straightforward manner, such as physical distance between people. *Perceptual barriers* are internal ones. The message sender goes into a situation with the message receiver having prejudice. They might assume that the message receiver does not understand what is being told to them or won't pay attention. This sort of prejudice affects the manner in which the message is expressed and can be a self-fulfilling prophecy or alienate the listener. The failure in communication lies entirely on the sender and can make them look foolish. *Emotional barriers* have a lot to do with a person's confidence and block the message before it can even be conveyed. An organization that wants to have two-sided communication with their members should take these barriers into consideration and do what they can to lower the threshold of initiating communication. *Cultural* and *language barriers* are highly relevant to this research and will be more closely discussed later on. *Gender barriers* are becoming less topical but still exist. Men and women tend to express themselves differently which leads to different interpretations of the meaning of the message. Finally, *interpersonal barriers* can block people from hearing and being heard. False perceptions are blocking the way of communication. These barriers can be broken with more communication. (The Seven Barriers of Communication, 2013)

Especially when it comes to promotional communication, the effect noise has is substantial. Noise in communication can mean anything that negatively affects the message between sending and receiving. The negative effects of noise concern all organizations trying to communicate with their target group. Efficiency is a must when communicating to a large audience. While personal communication is more guaranteed to reach the receiver and perceived in the way it was intended, it is just often not practical, so means of mass communication are used. The organization might send the message through electronic channels such as e-mail or social media, spread flyers and posters or promote their products or services with a physical visibility campaign. The problem is that the receivers are already receiving massive amounts of information, a lot of it promotional, from other senders through the same channels. These messages get interfered and the noise cancels itself out when the receiver decides that they rather not hear any than deal with it all. The organization might conclude that the members are passive and that nothing can be done, but Loimu (2012, 401-402) suggests that the problem should be redefined. The message receivers are not the problem, the senders are. The members are not passive and unresponsive, but rather the organization has failed to come up with ways of communication and activities that the members could become interested in.

2.5 Channels of marketing communication

The classic grouping of promotional tools is described in the “Promotional mix”. The five main aspects of it are advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, public relations, and direct marketing.

2.5.1 Advertising

An advertisement is “a paid insertion of a message in a medium” (Blythe 2006, 41). It is targeted to a large audience and therefore is non-personal. Examples of advertising include print ads, radio, television, billboards, direct mail, brochures, signs, posters, web pages, banner ads, and emails. Virtually any medium can be used. Obviously not all forms of advertising are applicable in the case of a small organization with limited means, such as TV and radio advertising. Creativity is the key to low budget marketing.

Today the Internet has become one of the most important forums for advertising. The Internet levels the playing field for small and large organizations. The role of marketing has changed since the introduction of the Internet and is not anymore fully applicable in its case, because the traditional advertising model focuses around mass media. The Internet, however, is composed of countless niche sites and few sites that truly reach the masses, such as Google, Facebook, YouTube and Wikipedia. The fact that the Internet is open to anyone is a great opportunity but has its challenges, too. It enables marketing with a small budget and a potentially huge audience, but the fact that there are so many individuals and organizations trying to get their message through forces the advertisers to become increasingly clever in their ways to capture and hold their target audience's attention, because it is easy for a user to ignore content in the internet. In Strauss and Frost's (2012, 291) opinion the keys to success in this environment are "(1) providing relevant, interesting messages when and where target customers want them and (2) engaging internet users by enticing them to upload content, make comments, or simply play with the game or other fun content". According to a recent study, 87% of the key demographic of our case association, 16-24 year old Finnish people, had used a social network service in the past three months (Statistics Finland 2013), and approximately 2 million Finns had a Facebook account. Therefore it can be said that though the popularity of Facebook has diminished within the young users in the recent past, it still is the most popular social network service and as such a very efficient media to use for advertising. Whereas Facebook's increase in user numbers has decelerated lately, the two other major social network services, Twitter and Google+, grew their user bases by 44% and 33% respectively from June 2012 to March 2013. In addition to the three big, there are a few other sites worth mentioning. In the beginning of 2014 Instagram was the fastest growing social network service with 200 million monthly active users worldwide. It might be far from Facebook's numbers, but whereas Instagram's number of active users grew by 23% between July and December 2013, Facebook's number decreased by 3% (Grapevine Media, 2014; Smith, 2014).

While the opportunities of advertising certainly are not limited to online mediums such as social media, it is arguably the most effective and cost-efficient medium for reaching a student organization's target audience. Examples of other online advertising include banner ads, email advertising and search engine result pages, but these means are not applicable in practice in this case because of the limited resources and their use would not be justified because of the small target group. Sufficient online coverage, however, should be ensured. The organization's social media pages and web page should be regularly updated and contain information that interests the existing and prospective members, and be constructed in a way that makes information seeking easy.

2.5.2 Personal selling

Personal selling is one of the most efficient weapons of marketing, but it is also an expensive option. It stands out from the other segments of the promotional mix in the sense that it is a lot more personal and contains two-sided communication with the customers. The feedback is a learning opportunity for the seller to familiarize themselves with the customer's needs, wants, reactions and purchasing behavior. Face-to-face communication also gives the opportunity to fix any possible misunderstanding the customer might have. From the standpoint of successful personal selling, it helps if the customer already has knowledge of the organization before the sale. It is preferable that they have already seen the advertisements and hopefully formed a positive image of the organization in their mind. Personal selling enables the seller to persuade, change the customer's mind, and create demand. (Blythe 2006, 254-255)

The challenge of personal selling is the unfortunate fact that personal selling has a bit of a bad reputation. The sales manner cannot be too aggressive or the customer will pull back. The seller should ensure that the customer doesn't feel like they're being manipulated, either. Any bad experience the customer might gain will lower the likelihood of repeat business, and if they share their bad experiences the organization's reputation will suffer and furthermore hinders sales. For these reasons it would be wise for the seller to familiarize themselves with the customers' need beforehand, or immediately when they come to contact with the customer. Only then can they offer the right solutions for both (Blythe 2006, 262). This, of course, is not directly applicable to an NPO, which only offers limited services and little to no products. Since the range of services is so restricted, it is even more important to figure out the needs and wants of the customers before sales. It should also be ensured that the sales personnel are well informed of the services provided and what they include, so that they can assure the customer of the benefits.

The four channels of sales are over-the-counter-selling, field selling, telemarketing and inside selling. Over-the-counter selling happens in retail, when the customers come directly to the seller, for example when a customer goes to a grocery store to buy bread. In the case of field selling the seller reaches a conclusion of where their potential buyers might, goes to that location and directly contacts the prospective customers face to face. Traditionally in telemarketing the seller contacts the prospective buyer directly by phone, and the contact is usually unsolicited. The customer can, however, also initiate the contact by calling to inquire for information or place an order. Inside selling happens by phone, mail or e-commerce. Each four of the channels are used in both business-to-customer and business-to-business sales, and they can be used combined (Personal sales and sales promotion 2010, 4). Of these four channels, the first two are used by the case organization. The customers can come directly to them at earlier announced occasions, pulled by advertising, or the organization can come to the prospective customers and perform sales or informing face to face.

2.5.3 Sales promotion

The objective of sales promotion is to increase sales in the immediate short term. Means of sales promotion are used for a predetermined time with the aim of increasing customer demand and creating market demand. Examples of the tools used include competitions, coupons, free samples and promotional items. Sales promotion should be used to gain customers, keep the old ones and as an asset in competition. Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman and Hansen (2009, 710) name three benefits of sales promotion. First off, it raises attention and pulls customers to the product. Secondly it can be an incentive that brings value to the customer. Thirdly, it encourages people to become customers and make purchases immediately, not just consider maybe becoming a customer in the future.

2.5.4 Public relations

PR is a form of marketing communications that aims to improve collaboration and relationships between an organization and its stakeholders. Internal PR invests in the organization’s internal interest groups, and its purpose can be to create a positive organization image, commit people to the organization and improving the atmosphere. External PR tends to the relationships with the organization’s external interest groups. By the means of PR an organization aims to increase its visibility to the public and create an image of it that leads to desired reactions from different interest groups. Typical means of PR include speaking at conferences, having briefings and working with the press.

The most common routes of PR are word of mouth, press and TV news stories, and personal recommendation. With the help of media, the impact of the message can be influenced. When the press tells a story of an organization, it holds more weight than if the organization itself has conveyed the same message. PR differs from advertising in the sense that it is usually not paid for by the organization, and its direct aim is not to increase sales, but to create positive associations in the long run, which then indirectly can have a positive impact on sales. Successful PR interests its target audience, and encourages them talk about the organization in a positive light. PR communications are also more likely to register with the target audience than advertisement, as it is not disregarded as easily. (Blythe 2006, 130-131)

The most common medium for PR is the press. Its advantage is a large audience. In order for the press to have interest in publishing about an organization, the story must benefit both parties. From the organization's perspective it should portrait them in a positive light and capture the target audience's interest. From the perspective of the press it must have value for them, that is to say it should be interesting to its readership/viewership, be topical, the style and values must be in accordance with theirs, and the story must not appear like a thinly veiled advertisement. PR stories are useful to a reporter in the sense that they are easy content filler. However, the organization should always remember that the press has the right of editing, and so the message they were trying to bring forward might not be the one that is published. That's why good relations with the press should be maintained. (Blythe 2006, 134-136)

Sometimes PR has to be defensive. When the organization is criticized, it must be able to respond in convincing manner. Critique can be received from many different directions such as customers, partners in cooperation or competitors. The first thing to do is to consider if there is any truth in the critique, what facts are brought forward, who are they attempting to influence and how are they doing it. Bad publicity should be reacted to immediately and openly, or the organization might appear guilty or like they are hiding something. Rumors should be shot down immediately. If the claims cannot be revoked with facts, the stakeholders can be appeased by assuring them that the matter has been taken under consideration, and necessary actions will be taken.

Internal PR aims to influence the internal interest groups, like the employees. A positive image of the organization increases an employee's motivation and loyalty. By means of PR a sense of openness can be created between the management and the employees. When people feel comfortable at their place of work, they are more likely to speak out and possibly recommend working there, which in turn expands the pool of prospective, already motivated workers.

2.5.5 Direct marketing

Direct marketing is any kind of marketing communications through any media, which directly reach people, or through which people can directly respond. Examples of the medias used are TV, radio, newspapers, text messages, emails and flyers. The idea is to make customers respond or take contact immediately. Direct marketing is aimed at a certain target group, whose purchasing behavior and history may preferably already be on record. For example, in e-commerce, cookies are used to collect information about products browsed and bought, which enables the web store to make relevant recommendations. Direct marketing is in the short term, and it gives direct and easily measurable results. Direct marketing helps avoid the costs of personal selling.

Planning is a very important part of direct marketing because the target group is so limited. Meisner (2006, 18) describes the planning process as a “strategic marketing pyramid”. On the top is the first thing to consider, which is the company objectives, or what the company hopes to achieve. After that it should be considered how these objectives could be met by the means of marketing. Next, the objectives of marketing should be more precisely considered and how they can be met. The fourth level is “strategic promotional disciplines”, which covers the disciplines used to achieve the goals set by marketing. After that the methodologies and approaches used for executing the disciplines in different medias should be determined. On the last level the medias that will be used are chosen.

The factors influencing the success of direct marketing are how well the target group has been determined, how appealing the offer is for the customers, timing, ease of reply for the customers, and selection of the right media.

2.6 The image of an organization

Oxford Dictionaries defines image as ”The general impression that a person, organization, or product presents to the public”. The image people have of different businesses or organizations and their products and services as well as the people behind them guide their actions and choices. Images are formed when people come into contact with the organization, meet their personnel, use their services, receive information from them, hear about them from an outside source and in many other ways. A person might not even have had any personal experiences of an organization but still has formed opinions and ideas of it. Several factors have an influence on the formation of the image including needs, values, information, observations, attitudes, prejudice and experiences. Some of the elements are rational, but many are emotional. (Isohookana 2007, 19-20)

Isohookana (2007, 20) states that an image is always real to its creator, and therefore an organization can’t say that the image their stakeholders have of them is not correct. The targeted image may differ greatly from the perceived image. These two images should be strived to be as equivalent to each other as possible and that is why the organization should track and inspect the images and alter their actions accordingly. (Isohookana 2007, 20-21) Images of an organization are formed whether the organization is knowingly building them or not. They cannot fully decide what the image will be like but they can influence it.

Vuokko (2003, 40) describes the challenges a marketer faces when influencing their target group in four steps. Each step is a phase in the decision making process. The first step is unfamiliarity, when the target group has never even heard of the product, service, organization or thing in question. Unfamiliarity prevents decision making and action, such as becoming a member. Unfamiliarity is only an issue when a person belongs in the target group. The situation may however change, the person might become a member of the target group and find a need to familiarize themself with the organization. The first step to overcome is the knowledge step, when a person asks: ‘What is it?’. They need to really find out what the organization is about in order to be on the knowledge step. Bringing target group members to this phase requires work from the organization and brings marketing related challenges. They need to acknowledge the issue and know how to increase their conspicuousness. The next step is image, and that is when the person decides if there is anything the organization can offer to them. It is the most critical step on the way to achieving action. A negative image will automatically turn the person off from the organization, they will not even consider. It is a hindrance to procuring members, sponsors and new players. The importance of image is as important to an NPO as it is to a business. It’s important to consider what kind of an image is conveyed to all of the stakeholders, how it has formed and how it can be influenced. If the image is negative and does not measure up with the needs and wished of a person, the decision making process will come to a stop. They might decide on an alternative option or opt out. But if at this step the person gets a feeling that there is, in fact, something ‘in it for them’, the process advances to the final step. On the action step people will try the product or the service, take part, get in touch or in some other way come to contact with the organization. The experiences gained on this step will define what happens in the future. If the experience is positive, the image they have of the organization will be positively reinforced and they are likely to come back. If the experience is negative, the connection might end there. Therefore building a good image in the minds of stakeholders is crucially important. (Vuokko 2003, 40-42; 189)

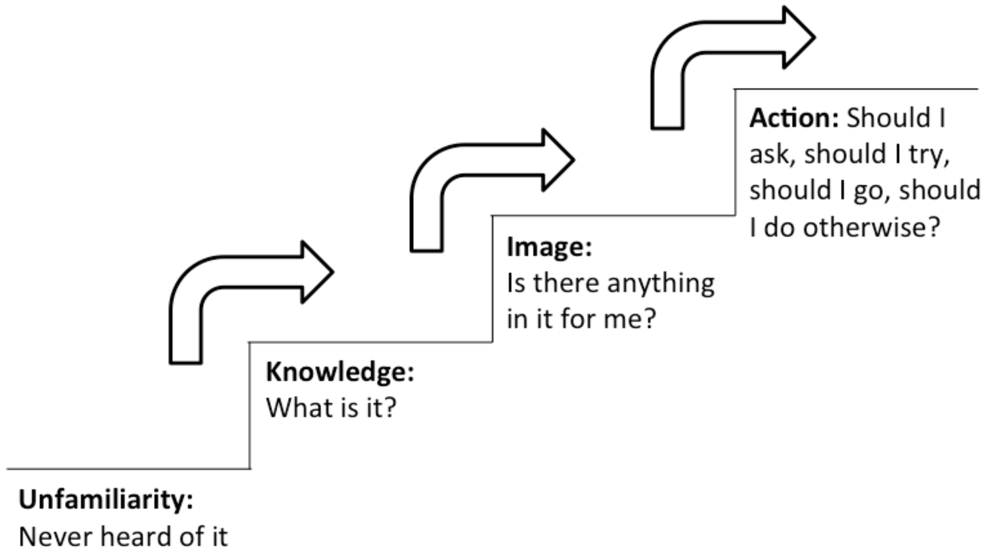

FIGURE 4. The steps of influence
(Vuokko 2003, 40)

Reputation is a noteworthy part of an organization's image. Pitkänen (2001, 17) states that two things appear to affect reputation. Firstly, reputation is being identified. People know organizations not only by their name but by their reputation as well. Conspicuousness is about communication, what is told and heard of the organization. By Smythe, Dorward and Reback's (1992, 19) definition "reputation is the sum of stories told about an organization". The organization should consider what story it is they want to convey. Secondly reputation is affected by public, audible feedback. Public evaluation can be negative or positive and lead to a negative or positive reputation. A good reputation can be achieved by providing good service. The customer then hopefully shares their good experiences with their circle of acquaintances, and they can confirm the message with their own positive experiences. By word of mouth the message of a good or a bad reputation effectively spreads about. Today's use of social media has made the spreading of word of mouth even more effectively by rapidly reaching large audiences.

3 IMPLEMENTING THE RESEARCH

3.1 Data collection

Data collection is the process of procuring information on subjects of interest in a systematic fashion for the purpose of answering research questions. In order to ensure the validity of the findings, it is essential that the right methods of data collection are used. The wrong approach will have an effect on the outcome of the research and lead to false conclusions. Two sources of empirical data exist: primary and secondary. Secondary data is knowledge that has already existed before the research at issue and can be used to gain initial insight into the theme of research. Primary data is directly collected by the researcher as first-hand experiences for the purposes of the research at hand. Primary or data has not been subjected to processing or any other manipulation. Both primary and secondary data collection include several methods that can be used individually or combined in a research.

3.1.1 Secondary data

Investigating secondary data enables a researcher to find answers to research questions and solve research problems. If enough information can be found from the secondary sources, there is no need for primary ones. It can help define and crop the topic of the research and make for a more focused approach. The findings made can be compared to the results of primary data collection. Secondary data analysis consumes less time and other resources than collecting primary data and provides an immense supply of information that is much more easily available. (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2002, 76-77)

Secondary data can be obtained by both qualitative and quantitative research. Secondary data is available in many forms. Some of the information can be obtained from internal sources. In a company this information could or example include existing data on sales, financials, customers, employees or marketing efforts. External sources include publications such as books as well as materials from electronic sources such as researches or articles published online. Source criticism must be applied when it comes to commercial publications. (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2002, 80)

Secondary sources are a great way to gather data because much of the background information needed for the research has usually already been gathered. Using this data can save a lot of time, an important asset. The monetary costs can also be significantly lower than those of conducting primary data. It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure the validity of the material used to the best of their ability, though it is not an issue if the data used comes from sources deemed reputable. Thanks to libraries and electronic sources immense amounts of data are readily available and easily accessible. Another advantage of secondary data is that it can help shape the research design and suggest various approaches. A researcher can explore anterior researches made to get ideas and inspiration for their own work. (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2002, 78)

External and internal sources of secondary data were used during this research. External sources included published materials such as books and articles, electronic databases, blogs by experts and data received by request from different sources. Internal sources were made available by the case organization. These included previous research conducted and various documents relevant to the research such as annual reports, plans of action and various statistics. After extensive research of secondary data, it could be determined that collecting primary data was necessary in order to answer the research questions as not all information needed existed within the secondary data available.

3.1.2 Primary data

Primary data is data collected by the researcher using the sources. When secondary data sources are not enough to provide a solution to the research problem, primary data must be sought. As it is gathered exclusively for the purposes of the particular research, the information is certainly relevant. What questions should be asked the source depends on the research design and objectives.

The most common primary data collection methods of qualitative research are interview, survey and observation. The selection of the method depends on the research problem and resources available. As earlier mentioned, primary data collection is much more costly than that of secondary data but in many cases is necessary when not enough relevant information readily exists. While the basic idea of both interviews and surveys is quite similar, differences lie in many of the details. According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2012, 73) Eskola (1975) defines surveys as such procedures where informants themselves fill out a questionnaire either in a controlled group setting or at their home. Interviews, on the other hand, are private situations where the interviewer verbally asks questions and makes notes of the interviewee's answers. Thus the difference between a survey and an interview has to do with the informant's actions in the data acquisition phase (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2012, 73).

A survey is a research strategy, which aims to collect data from a large sample by means of inquiry or interview methods. While the premise of a survey-type research comes from quantitative research, depending on the methods used the data can be analyzed in either a quantitative or qualitative manner (Survey). A survey is an efficient tool for finding out the respondents' opinions and attitudes. According to Johnson and Reynolds (2011), five factors should be taken into consideration when designing a survey: cost, completion rates, sample-population congruence, length of questionnaire and data processing issues. Because the completion rate is often low and the responses to open questions brief, there is a risk of the sample not being representative of the population. This is particularly problematic since the people who ignore the survey share common characteristics, which can create a sampling error and lead to incorrect conclusions. Long questionnaires also include a risk of the responders losing interest, which leads to poor response quality. Analyzing long questionnaires with elaborate designs and many open-ended questions takes a lot of time and effort.

An interview is a conversation between two or more people, which requires real interaction between the researcher and the respondent. Three fundamental types of research interviews exist: structured, semi-structured and unstructured. Structured interviews are similar to surveys in a sense that essentially they are verbally conducted questionnaires as every question is predetermined. They are quick and easy to carry out and analyze. The data received offers little depth. Semi-structured interviews consist of a predetermined theme and key questions but leave room for the interviewer to ask follow-up questions and go into more detail. This method is used when a certain amount of depth is wanted from the answers and when little is known about the subject area (Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick 2008). In the case of an unstructured interview the questions are not prearranged which allows for spontaneity. Out of the three interview models the unstructured one most resembles a conversation. The method requires the researcher to be well acquainted with the subject beforehand and can lead to real discoveries (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2002, 101).

Observation is the third of the three common qualitative research method tools. Observation as a sole data capture method is challenging, but combining it with interviewing or some other data capturing method can turn out to be very productive. Observation is a preferable method when little is known about the phenomena. When combined with an interview, observation can reveal inconsistencies between verbal responses and behavior. On the other hand, interviews can also help explain observed behavior (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2012, 81). In other words with the help of observation it can be determined whether people really behave like they say they do. The role of the observer can be either participant or non-participant. Participant observation can be either active, when the observer actively has an effect on the research phenomena, or passive, when the observer participates in the phenomena but has no effect on the course of situations. In both cases the researcher needs to be able to determine their own role in and its effect on the situation. Non-participatory or direct observation is used especially when the researcher wishes to study a situation without the subjects' knowledge. The research situation can also be organized in a manner where the subjects are aware of the observer's presence (open direct observation). After choosing the approach the researcher must stay in their role or the results might get corrupted (Puusniekka & Saaranen-Kauppinen 2006).

3.2 Collecting primary data with interviews

The primary data for the research was collected by semi-structured interviews, which were mainly conducted as recorded face-to-face interviews and with online discussion via instant messaging in one case. All prospective interviewees were contacted either via an online student community or face to face at their place of study, after which some necessary background information was collected to determine which individuals were suitable for interviewing. A basic formula of the interview questions was prepared which was then adapted in the case of each individual interview as the interviewer received more information about the interviewee. In the case of the interviewees who were not familiar with the case organization, the interview questions had to be strongly adapted while still keeping to the main themes of the research. The interviews were conducted in Finnish in the case of the Finnish students and in English in the case of students of any other nationality. The author felt it necessary to use Finnish in the case of Finnish students to avoid language restrictions or misunderstandings. The author also determined that it would not have an impact on the reliability of the research as the interview questions translated very smoothly into Finnish.

The method of contacting the interviewees was chosen because of their practicality and a good, versatile sample. The initial method used was contacting people via the Internet community, which was proven not to be a very effective method. It turned out to be much more productive to contact the students face to face and offer them an incentive to participate, which in this case was a small financial gain for them in form of a free admission to a student event.

The structure of the interview was designed in a way that it would cover each basic theme of the research in turn. The interview would start by collecting essential background information. The pieces of information gathered were gender, study programme, nationality and study year. It was important for the sake of valid and truthful answers that the interviewees could be sure their answers remained anonymous. Because of the relatively small sample of foreign students, no information of age or nationality was included in the results, as the subjects could be potentially identified on the basis of that information. Although nationality was not included, each subject was categorized, either “Finnish”, “Non-Finnish European” or “Non-Finnish Non-European”. In addition to the above-mentioned background questions, the interviewees were asked to describe in their own words what their prior knowledge of the organization was. The rest of the interview could be divided into two parts. The first part covered the perceived image of the organization. The purpose of the first part was for the interviewer to gain knowledge of the subject’s mental image of the organization and their conception of its functions. The information received could be used to ask defining follow-up questions and, if necessary, remodel the remaining questions. The second part of the interview focused on the organizations’ communication and its efficiency. The significance of the questions was to find out how the subjects perceived the communication coming their way and how it could be adjusted to best reach the target group. The third main objective of the interviews was to find out what an average student wants from a student organization. This was addressed by directly asking as well as subtly encouraging them to express it in their other answers.

3.3 Collecting primary data with observation

The background data necessary for conducting the research was gathered in an unstructured fashion by the author in the course of the two and a half years they spent as a board member in the case organization. The author's main role in the organization was event organizer, which gave them a good insight into the student culture. The duties required a good deal of interaction and communication with the members as well as other stakeholders. Most observations were made during the process of organizing events from promotional communications to event execution. The author also took part in other functions of the organization where direct communication was established with members such as customer service. The researcher's observer role could be best described as a participant observer.

3.4 Analysing data

Saunders (2006, 475) emphasizes the importance of transcribing recorded audio data from interviews. Transcribing is the logical first step in data analysis, as it should be done as soon as possible after the interview so no information is lost. Not only the words should be transcribed but the way they are said should be documented as well. The appropriate background information should be included in the files including the transcription for later need in the analysis process while maintaining the required level of interviewee anonymity (Saunders 2006, 475-476).

According to Saunders (2006, 478) there is no standardized approach to analyzing qualitative data. Approaches vary greatly in terms of how structured they are and how much interpretation is allowed. While the approached vary, common tools can be used to process the information. The first one of these activities is *categorization*. It involves classifying the information to certain categories that provides structure relevant for further analysis. The categories should be structured from the basis of the research questions and objectives. In order to be meaningful the categories must be relevant and meaningful both in relation to the data as well as other categories. The second activity of the analytical process is *'unitizing' data*, attaching the pieces of data to the appropriate categories. It is a selective process aiming to classify and reduce the information into a more manageable form. In this part of the analysis process patterns may already begin to emerge. The third step of the process is *recognizing relationships and developing categories.* As the analysis deepens, more connections are found from the rearranged data and the new information may be used to make adjustments to the categories and the need may emerge to create more. The final step is *developing and testing hypotheses or propositions.* Hypotheses are used to test the discovered connections between categories actually exist. Hypotheses emerging from the data should be tested by seeking alternative explanations. Only by testing can the validity of the conclusions be confirmed. (Saunders 2006, 478-484)

The approach to analysis can be either inductive or deductive. Induction is a form of reasoning that starts from a group of individual observations, which are used to form a generalization or theory. Deductive reasoning, in the other hand, is a top-down approach where conclusions are drawn from proven facts. In this research the approach chosen was inductive.

4 RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

Eight people were interviewed in the process of making this thesis. Three of them were Finnish and five of them were foreign, two of whom were exchange students. The decision to focus on foreign students was based on the research problem. Because each one of the interviewees belonged to the case organization's target group, it could be concluded that the sample was representational enough. Six of the interviewees were males and two were females. Judging from previous research, the gender of the respondents had little to no impact to the results.

The research had three themes, which were transformed into three research questions:

- **IMAGE:** How is the organization perceived within the target group?
- **COMMUNICATION:** How could communication be enhanced? And
- **ATTRACTIVENESS:** How to make the organization more appealing?

The results for the three themes will next be covered one by one.

4.1 Image

Student organizations are most commonly known within their target group for their parties, and Jyväskylän Tradenomiopiskelijat is no exception. Each one of the people interviewed mentioned the parties when they were asked what they knew of the organization, and most mentioned it first. It became clear that the organization's image is a "party host", whether that was the intended image or not. The responders did, however, all compliment on the communication and execution of these parties. Therefore the image, in this respect, is positive. Unfortunately it did become clear that the non-Finnish students felt like the parties, as well as other events, were directed more to the Finnish students rather than all students. While most did answer that they felt all students were equally taken into consideration in the big picture, they did not feel quite as welcomed to the events mainly because of language issues, and because they did not feel like “a part of the group”. When one of the interviewees (non-Finnish non-European male) was asked if he felt like foreign students had equal opportunities with the Finnish ones his reply was “I guess that Finns have a bit more opportunities, because the language of Konkurssi is mainly Finnish, as far as I know”. Another interviewee raised a point that if the music played at the events was all Finnish, they would feel uncomfortable and would prefer to be somewhere else. Another pointed out that pretty much anything in Finnish makes them lose interest, even when translations are available.

While the interviewees said the communication about events was sufficient, it became clear that knowledge of the other aspects of the organization was lacking. This made forming a mental image of the organization hard, and it was came clear in the responses to the questions about the image, when the responders had a hard time putting their thoughts into words and explaining their views. The purpose of the organization did not appear to be very apparent to the students. Some of the interviewees could describe it in a general level, but when they were told what the official purpose was, they expressed that it was not very clear to the students how exactly the purpose was implemented by the organization. When one of the interviewees (Finnish male) was told about the purpose of the organization and asked if they felt like the organization was implementing it, their answer was “I have noticed very few benefits in practice. I don’t know everything that is happening on the background, but in my opinion it shows very little in practice”.

When they were asked if they felt like they could receive help (trusteeship) from the organization, most responded with a careful ‘yes’, whereas some said that they really couldn’t say because they had never needed it and didn’t know how they could initiate contact, and because they weren’t exactly sure how or if the organization could help. One of the responders said that frankly the organization wouldn't be where they'd seek help from.

The interviewees were asked if they felt like they could benefit from being members, and the answers ranged from unsure to negative. The prevalent view was that there was very little concrete benefit. Some brought out the benefits of student friendly pricing at the parties, and wished there would be other financial benefits.

4.2 Communication

As it was established in the previous part, the responders felt like informing about the events was sufficient, but it became evident that there were some serious shortcomings in the communication when it came to the other parts of the organization's operations. The responders turned out to have very limited knowledge especially about the trusteeship services. Many wished for more information about the subject.

When asked where they had heard of the organization, nearly all brought up the organization's introduction during the freshman orientation week. After the introduction very little new information had come their way, which they deemed unfortunate. Despite the importance of the freshman week orientation, several pointed out that not much of the contents of the introduction had stuck in their mind because of the exhaustive amount of information they had received during the week. In addition the mentions of the introduction, several of the interviewees mentioned that a lot of the information they had received came from their peers who were actively involved with the organization, as well as other peers interested in the organization. The power of word of mouth became very apparent.

Not surprisingly the replies of the interviewees were consistent with the secondary research made when it came to their use of social media. Despite the decline of active use, Facebook still emerged as the number one social media site used, as each of the interviewees said they used it. Most also said that they follow the organization on Facebook. The second most used site was Instagram, and the users wished that the organization would be more active on it. Twitter was also mentioned by most. One of the interviewees suggested that the social media pages should be integrated so that they could view all of the social media content from one single source. One of the most common challenges of communication, noise, came up several times in the responses. When observing the users in social media it has been apparent for some time now that users are becoming decreasingly responsive to promotional communication. This shows as users not replying to invitations and poorly reacting to other means of communication, too. Many of the responders said that they get so much information online that they have to ignore a lot of it, intentionally or not. They wished that the important information would somehow pop out, stand out of the mass. This also applied to other forms of communication, like printed advertisements. When the interviewees were requested to honestly tell how much attention they paid to various forms of communication, the differences between active information seekers and passive information receivers became apparent. Most didn’t find email messaging a very efficient means of communication due to the information overload they already get. Most didn’t find the emails bothersome, but they were easily ignored. One of the interviewees strongly pointed out that they didn’t wish for unsolicited messaging. Newsletters were found almost as ineffective as emails. A couple of the interviewees told that they actively sought information about the organization from Facebook and by using Google, and said that they usually found what they mostly found what they were looking for.

Somewhat surprisingly, the interviewees’ reactions to personal selling and direct marketing were almost exclusively positive. The responses to the promotion stands/booths the organization regularly has were exclusively positive, and most of the responders found them interesting and convenient for communication and business. “No, they are not disturbing at all. They are useful in that sense that I can ask them some information straight away, if I need to” was one of the interviewees’ answers, which quite accurately represented the general opinion. None found them disturbing. Two of the interviewees wished that the stands were held more often so that they wouldn’t miss a chance to do business at them. All in all the interviewees wished for more physical visibility from the organization.

4.3 Attractiveness

It could be very clearly observed that students respond well to any financial incentive such as discounts and free stuff. This could be first observed from the fact that they were easily persuaded into participating in the interview when they heard they would make a small saving if they said yes. When they were asked what they wanted from a student organization, most mentioned that they would like to receive discounts as members. Many also mentioned that they were happy that they could get overall patches when they attended the events. It had also been previously observed that students were more tempted to attend when overall patches were available.

It became evident that the interviewees were not at all familiar with the existing benefits of membership. Therefore they did not see a point in making a point to be a member. The responders were very interested in receiving member benefits, and they also wished that they could receive more occupational help.

The image and the word of mouth were clearly very important to the students, especially within the foreign students. The foreign students also highlighted the fact that the social circles were too small and they wished for more interaction with students from other study programmes, the university and other ethnicities, and if the circles were in fact broader they would be more inclined to attend events. The foreign students, more often than the Finnish ones, said that they decided whether or not to attend on the basis of how many people were going to attend and if their friends were going there too. In fact the students of International Business largely based their decisions on the behavior of their peers, giving even more importance to word of mouth.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Reliability

The client of this thesis did not ask for any part of the thesis to be concealed, but the researcher was still very careful of what information could be brought to public. Proper ethical treatment towards the research interviewees and subjects observed was ensured by only recording the relevant data, which did not include any information that could potentially lead to identifying any of them.

Due to the nature of the changing environment of communication, it was important for the validity of the research to only include topical sources in the literature review and secondary data collection. Particular consideration was put into making sure that the researches and data referred to was very recent. Because it was important that the themes of the research were examined from many different viewpoints, information about each theme was sought from several different sources and publications by different authors. It is the opinion of the author that the source material chosen was versatile, and excellently complied with the themes of the research.

After the primary data from the interviews was gathered, it was immediately gone through, the information categorized and analyzed, so that no comment or impact of any non-verbal communication would be left unrecorded. The sample size was eight interviewees. Five of them were non-Finnish students, and the remaining three Finnish. The reason for the emphasis on foreign students was directly due to the research problem. The sample represented the average student well. The justification for the size of the sample is the fact that by the time eight interviews were conducted the same themes had emerged often in the answers, thus saturation had been reached. The results had very little open for interpretation and few inconsistencies occurred. The research results supported the theories that had come up in the literature review, but also clearly brought forward new information.

The fact that the author’s background must have had some impact on the execution of the research cannot be denied. However in their opinion it was only an asset, because they already had the knowledge base of the organization’s operations and communication, and the observations made could be used as a basis for the research. Regardless of the background, the author was completely neutral because they had not had a role in the organization for a year before the research was conducted. It was ensured that none of the author’s personal opinions showed through the interview questions, and that all but one of the interviewees were unaware of the interviewer’s connection to the organization.

It is worth mentioning that the research design of this thesis could well be re-utilized in the future to conduct either follow-up research or another research with a similar research problem.

5.2 Conclusions

A lot of the points made about communication in the theoretical framework proved to have a connection with the research results. It turned out that the awareness the students had about the organization’s functions had not experienced much change since the research referred to in chapter 1.2, however now much more specific information on the subject was received. Not surprisingly, the quality of communication proved to be just as important as expected, and that the lack of a strategy had a big impact on the awareness. Chapter 2.6 described Vuokko’s (2006, 40) steps of influence and mentioned that it’s an important part of a customer’s decision making process to know how exactly they can benefit from becoming members. The results of this research fully supported the claim. As it was already mentioned in the previous chapter, the difference between active information seekers and passive information receivers became very apparent. In chapter 2.4 challenges of communication were covered with the help of Åberg's (2000, 31) theories. Noise as a challenge was one of the points, and it became apparent that it was a huge issue in the case organization's communication processes as well. Many of the respondents replied, in their own words, that the case organization's marketing communication was not standing out from the mass. Chapter 2.2 mentioned how Juholin (2009, 36) put an emphasis on the importance of feedback. The lack of it became apparent. Finally in chapter 2.6.1 the use of social media in advertising was covered, and the research results were compliant with the pattern presented.

During the research it was not possible to find out what kind of images people had who hadn't had any experience with the case organization, because each of the randomly picked interviewees had already been in some contact with the organization. Thus, experiences had had an impact on the image each interviewee had. While the images described were mostly positive, they were one-sided. In the course of this report the importance of word of mouth has been mentioned several times, and the importance became even more apparent from the results of the interviews. Word of mouth appeared to be mostly positive.

Answers to each of the research questions were satisfactorily received. It was difficult to get a direct answer to the question "How to make the organization more appealing?" from the data, but conclusions could be made and suggestions based on those conclusions could be made. A great deal of material was received that conclusions could be drawn from and which could be used to continue research.

The results of this research are useful for the case organization because now the thoughts and opinions of the members have finally been mapped out and recorded. No such recorded and analyzed information existed before. The research design can be reused if necessary to take the research further. The theory, results and suggestions in this thesis can all be utilized in the process of developing the communication of the organization to a direction that better suits their needs.

5.3 Suggestions

The image of the organization can be influenced, and it should. The first step to doing so is determining what the desired image is. According to the results of this research the current image of the organization is quite one-sidedly a party organizer. There is not necessarily anything wrong with that image, especially as the public opinion is that the organization organizes good parties, but it should be determined if that, in fact, is the image the organization wants for itself. If a more serious, professional image is desired, the mission of the organization as a supervisor of the interest of the students should be highlighted. The target group should be made more aware of the services provided other than just the events. The members should be encouraged to contact the organization when they are in need of trusteeship. A new way of communication with a low threshold for initiating contact could be created, with perhaps an option for the student to remain anonymous. The author’s suggestion for a concrete way of influencing the image is to organize a campaign with the message that student organization’s are not just for fun and games. The campaign would have the greatest impact if it were timed in the middle of the autumn semester, when the new students have already had a chance to experience the student life opportunities, and are still suggestible for new information.

It became apparent from the interviews that the students themselves wished for more informing from the organization about services other than the events. As many of the interviewees named the freshman orientation week introduction as their only or primary source of information about the organization, it is clear that it is one of the most effective means of informing that is currently utilized and the tradition should be carried on. However, the impact that can be made during the presentation is very limited not only because of the short timeslot, but also because the orientation week is so packed with information that not everything will stay in the students' minds. Therefore the message should be reinforced after the students have settled into the student life. Because word of mouth is so important, encouraging tutors to promote the organization and spread messages about the benefits of membership to the new students could very well prove advantageous. This would require for the tutors to be thoroughly informed about the operations of the organization, and some sort of motivator would be also needed. The degree and international tutors are in a key role.

When it comes to online presence, the most pressing issue at the moment, in the opinion of the author, would be to update the organization's website and keep updating them with new content at a regular interval. The present situation is far from being up to standards and it only has a negative impact on the credibility and the image of the organization. The organization's Facebook page is in a much better state, but it could be more active. Also, becoming more active on Instagram and Twitter and linking them to Facebook would increase online visibility and be well received by the online followers.

The physical visibility of the organization could well be increased, because according to the results the students respond well to it. They show much more interest and are more likely to have interaction face-to-face than online. The interviewees each had a positive reaction to promotional stands, so they could well be utilized more, and their use could be more versatile. They could be used as an icebreaker to contact new students, inform them about the services and perhaps recruit new actives.

Finally we move on into the third main theme, attractiveness. According to the results of the research the number one thing that attracts members are member benefits. Naturally the first thing to do is to determine what kind of benefits the members want, which of those can be executed and how it can be done. The prospective members should be made aware of the existing benefits of membership such as trusteeship and the services provided by the national BBA student union. The students would also respond well to getting membership discounts from partners and really any kind of way of saving money or receiving free stuff. The key issue here is informing the target group – the benefits won't help increasing the number of members if the people aren't made aware of them.

As it came out in the interviews, the students would like to receive more occupational help. The role of the person in charge of corporate connections could be broadened to include more serviced that would assist the students' professional growth. Promoting efforts would be great in the beginning, but it would have a direct positive impact on the image of the organization.

Jyväskylän Tradenomiopiskelijat ry has been doing a good job on supporting the student spirit, and the members have noticed it. A lot of positive feedback has been received about the overall patches distributed in the events and the habit should be continued since it clearly attracts attendees. To delight members as well as make a small profit, more overall patches unrelated to events could be ordered and resold to the students. Keeping supply low on each different design creates demand as students like having unique overall patches.

Returning to online visibility, there are a few factors that should be pointed out in relation to the attractiveness of the organization. First off, the popularity of events would be increased, especially within the foreign students, if more people would express their interest online. Decisions on whether to attend an event or not are often based on the number of other attendees, and the question if the person has any friends attending or not. Therefore more invitations should be distributed and people should be prompted to express that they will be attending. According to Cooper (2013) pictures in social media raise far more attention and receive comments than links, videos and text, so increasing the use of pictures is advisable. Short messages also generate more interest than long ones, so combining an interesting picture with a short description is a winning combination. The content created should be easily agreeable and likeable and encourage a user to share it. An old trick of Facebook advertising is to attract followers with competitions, and it still works. Jyväskylän Tradenomiopiskelijat could, for example, organize a raffle for the freshmen where one of the new followers would win a student overall.

Finally, the author would like to encourage Jyväskylän Tradenomiopiskelijat to keep the research going on. Students should be actively questioned about their needs, wants and ideas. Further research could be conducted on what kind of member benefits would be the best for attracting new members.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview question base
Note: Jyväskylän Tradenomiopiskelijat ry is more commonly known as ”Konkurssi” among the students.

PART A

1. Please tell me what you know about Konkurssi
2. Do you follow Konkurssi online?
   - What is your opinion on them? Do you get enough information?
3. The object of Konkurssi is to provide trusteeship to its members, develop and improve the content of education and studentship as well as work as link and a means of communication between the members, the national union, the student union and JAMK. Is it apparent to you in some way as an ordinary student? Do you feel like Konkurssi is implementing its purpose?
4. In your opinion what concrete use is there of a student organization?
5. Do you think Konkurssi takes into consideration the needs of all student from different study programmes equally?
   - (To foreign students: Do you feel like the needs of non-Finnish speaking students are taken into consideration?)
6. What do you think about Konkurssi as an event organizer?

PART B

1. Do you feel like you receive enough information about
   a. Events
   b. Services
   c. Member benefits?
2. Do you feel like you get information from Konkurssi on time?
3. Where do you most commonly hear about Konkurssi’s events?
4. How have you received the information you have about Konkurssi?
5. How much do you pay attention to
   a. Announcements on Facebook
   b. JAMKO newsletter
   c. Printed ads
   d. E-mails to your student e-mail address
   e. Informative events such as Konkurssi’s on-campus stands?
6. When you see a student organization’s stand at the campus, how do you react to it?
7. What social media sites or applications do you use?
8. How do you feel about being directly contacted for example via e-mail?
9. What do you want from a student organization?